



## Local-food facilities plan to join forces

Posted: Wednesday, February 9, 2011 9:10 am

By Jim Massey | Editor |

MADISON - Three southwestern Wisconsin food-processing facilities are making plans to work together to meet a growing urban demand for local food.

The Innovation Kitchen in Mineral Point, Greenco Industries in Monroe, and the soon-to-be-built Sharing Spaces Kitchen in Prairie du Chien are coordinating to form the Food Action Alliance, a network of food-processing facilities that will market their products together.

Rick Terrien, executive director of the Iowa County Area Economic Development Corp., outlined the plans Jan. 27 during a session at the Midwest Value-Added Conference.



Rick Terrien

The facilities employ developmentally disabled people from five counties to process and package food for local farmers and food companies.

The \$1.5-million Innovation Kitchen opened last summer as a state-of-the-art commercial food-processing facility. The 10,000-square-foot kitchen is open to community members who want to process food, or they can hire the kitchen's staff to process, package and label their products.

Terrien said the first six months of operation have been extremely successful.

"They processed 25,000 pounds of produce the first three months they were open," Terrien said. "What we're finding is yes, there's a role for incubator kitchens for people to come in and process their own food, but the real value - as we kind of anticipated and hoped - are the processing services. Farmers can bring their produce to us and take it home as a finished product with a label on it."

There are several businesses at the Dane County farmers market in Madison that hire the Innovation Kitchen for packaging and labeling, Terrien said.

Dan Moris, director of the Sharing Spaces Kitchen, said he's hopeful ground will be broken for the 6,500-square-foot Crawford County facility in the spring and that it will be open by August.

"We've had a few entrepreneurs say they want to come in and make the products in the kitchen, but as you get talking to them, they realize it might be better to have us make the product using their recipe," Moris said. "If we can make it for them it makes a lot more sense."

The third partner in the project, Greenco Industries in Monroe, has 4,500 square feet of cold storage space that could be used as the three organizations pool their products before they are shipped to urban markets.

"We're hoping we can increase capacity so we can take bigger orders," Greenco Executive Director Jean Zweifel said. "We've shared jobs with other work centers in the past if we have something more than we can handle. Most of what we would do with the other two centers would probably be food-related."

Local food-processing plants are the missing link between farmers and urban markets, Terrien said. He said there are about 40 million people within a half day's drive of southwestern Wisconsin, and they are looking for locally produced food.

Terrien said Karen Lehman, executive director of Fresh Taste, an organization formed to advance local agriculture and healthful eating in Chicago, recently brought a five-state delegation to the Innovation Kitchen and left impressed.

"She said, 'We have 8 million people in the Chicago metro area and this is what we need,' " Terrien said. "She said these kinds of facilities build communities and human capital."

Terrien said he's optimistic that the Food Action Alliance project will take off.

"It's the next layer up," he said. "We're going to try three facilities working together first and then next year go to 10 and then after that go to 50."

Jim Massey can be reached at 608-574-8011 or [jimmassey@mhtc.net](mailto:jimmassey@mhtc.net).

This article was originally published in The Country Today, February 9, 2011.

You can visit The Country Today at: [www.thecountrytoday.com](http://www.thecountrytoday.com)

You can subscribe to The Country Today here:

The Country Today  
715-833-9270 or 800-236-4004  
[thecountrytoday@ecpc.com](mailto:thecountrytoday@ecpc.com)  
701 S. Farwell Street  
Eau Claire, WI 54701